Johnson's Biographer In a New Light

YOUNG BOSWELL. By Chauncey Brewster Tinker. Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press.

Prof. Tinker believes James Boswell had genius, an extraordinary capacity for friendship, and that his flow of animal spirits and high good humor was not alone a marked asset in his success in life but also afforded genuine pleasure to his friends. And to demonstrate all this he has written what he calls "a group of connected essays," eleven in number, which proves to be a most interesting—yes, fascinating—life of Johnson's biographer. Moreover, there is considerable new information in the text drawn from Prof. Tinker's studies for his forthcoming edition of Boswell's correspondence.

He summarizes his opinions of Boswell in the preface to this work, in which he says: "James Boswell has fared rather badly at the hands of most people who have written about him. For myself, I frankly admit that I have enjoyed my association with him, and that I have no desire either to patronize him or sit in judgment on his occasional lapses from social propriety and moral standards. That Boswell was at times a very foolish young man any reader may see; but he was not, I think, so foolish as many of his critics have been. When all is said, he had genius, and of that I have tried to make a sympathetic study, preferring to err, if I must err, on the side of appreciation."

Of his reasons for giving so sentimental a title to his book, Prof. Tinker writes: "I have called this book 'Young Boswell' because it seemed to me that the spirit which imbued his entire literary work was essentially youthful. Even in the role of hero-worshipper—a simple conception of him which has satisfied many critics—there is something of youth and its illusions. When Boswell was at his best there were present in him the qualities associated with youth—confidence, buoyancy, hope and an appetite for experience—as well as the common faults of youth-self-indulgence and self-esteem."

In neither of these appreciations curiously enough does Prof. Tinker mention one quality possessed by Boswell that stands out very conspicuously in his life. This is his indomitable pursuit of making the acquaintance of distinguished men, of gaining his ends with uncommon and varied shrewdnesses and of making firm friends of most of the great men so variously approached. We get the first glimpse of this persistency in the manner he fell in with his father's plan that James should go to Utrecht to study law, or to continue the studies begun in Edinburgh. To James Holland was but the port of entry for wider travels in Europe, and by attending classes in Utrecht he eventually made his way to Germany, Switzerland and Italy and Corsica.

Each of the last mentioned three countries furnished him with a lion, a friend and, in the case of Corsica, not only a friend but material for his first literary success. Switzerland brought him to Rousseau, Italy to Wilkes and Corsica gave him Gen. Paoli and his "An Account of Corsica," which had a great vogue and was of some moment politically. There is surely something approaching genius in the manner in which Boswell so variously approached three such different men as Rousseau, Wilkes and Paoli. And surely there is genius in friendship in converting the suspicious Paoli of their first interview to the admiring friend the elder man became when he took up residence in England. With Prof. Tinker the Corsican had an intense admiration for Boswell's lively humor, a quality so inimitable that even Fanny Burney, much as she disliked it, could not help but be amused at James's imitations of Johnson.

The essay devoted to Boswell's meeting with the French philosopher, which occurred during the winter of 1764-65, contains much new matter, as summarized briefly in the foregoing, owing to the fact that Prof. Tinker has had the good fortune to come into possession of copies of Boswell's letters to Rousseau, "which have never been published or even read over by scholars." They show to the full Boswell's singular ability to "get on the right side" of men, even of one so difficult of approach as Rousseau, his first letter asking for the privilege of calling being a masterpiece of understanding, and the power to flatter without overdoing it. And his first letter to Wilkes is equally a masterpiece, but in quite a different mood.

It is curious that Boswell could not impress women with the same ease he did men. Doubtless his heart was not so much set upon those feminine conquests, although he thought he was madly in love on several occasions, and the women to whom he paid his admiration saw through him. In any case it was so with Isabelle de Zuylen, the "Zelide" of his Utrecht days, with that "Princess" whose amusing refusal of him was set down by Boswell as meticulously as one of his conversations with Johnson, and with the Irish girl, briefest episode of all.

Prof. Tinker makes a very good case for his "Young Boswell," particularly in showing that the conventional idea of his folly and gross hero-worship is not well founded. And he shows why one of Boswell's relatives, who did not admire James or his great work as a rule, said of him: "He preferred being a showman to keeping a shop of his own." This volume lets us know just how good a "showman" he was.

The Common Sense Of the Unconscious

OUR UNCONSCIOUS MIND. By Frederick Pierce. E. P. Dutton & Co.

MR. PIERCE seeks to explain the relation between our conscious and unconscious self. It is one of "those mind books," but it is different from many of them in that the author in his effort to make clear the hidden motives controlling human actions, in fact, their real driving power, aims at simplicity of treatment and an actually practical helpfulness in every day life and work. The lay reader may limp, figuratively, through Mr. Pierce's scientific explanations, but he will be more than repaid by the charm of the treasures to which they are the key.

The author is as scientific perhaps as he should be. While psychology as a study goes back into the early dawn of scientific research, the science of the mind, as it is understood to-day, is scarcely more than in its infancy. It has already the helpful jargon of a science, but so rapid has been its development that psychologists are often puzzled as to the exact meaning of its terminology.

Any person who wishes to understand Mr. Pierce's scientific discussions should study his theories and discussions before they have received the dilettante manhandling which has been the fate of those of most of his predecessors in mental investigations. There is quite enough of the mysteries and the esoteric in the varied meanings of the much abused word "complex," of "libido," "foreconsciousness" and "response models" to start a whole troops of Hermiones and members of "our select circle of serious thinkers" out on their bounden duty of substracting from the knowledge of the world.

Mr. Pierce may not draw more clearly than any other writer has the line between the conscious and the unconscious. It is a difficult thing to do. He impresses upon the reader, however, in a sensible sort of way, the effect of the two upon human motives and actions.

As a corrective for worry, Mr. Pierce suggests a thorough analysis of the cause, advice if advice is needed, then the mapping out of a line of action. Put the paper on which the plan of attack is written out in a drawer "and definitely refuse to refer to it again unless the crisis arrives. Meantime, knowing that the matter has had your clearest and best thought, rule it out of the mind as completely as any other finished item of the day's work. This can be done both by positive auto-suggestion and the replacement of another idea the moment any signs of the worry appear."

In every effort at achievement there is always the fear of defeat. "This fear of defeat—of having sacrificed all pleasures of indulgences and then not having gained the achievement wished—is, I believe, one of the most paralyzing factors in operating the will." After an analysis of the situation the first thing is to strengthen the wish for achievement; "the imagination should be directed specifically upon the desired achievement at every opportunity; not upon the process toward the goal so much as upon the goal as definitely selected and surely attainable."

But in his discussions of the processes of the mind Mr. Pierce presupposes the existence of a mind as well as of a will which may be judiciously exercised. This leads to a peculiarly interesting phase of the book and one of its most valuable attributes. The whole subject of the study of the mind has suffered so much from misrepresentation and quackery that what he has to say is well worth reading.

No theories have been more ignorantly and sensationally handled than those of Prof. Sigmund Freud of Vienna. Persons who perhaps have never read one of his works and who may not have possessed the mental training necessary to its understanding if they had read it, have been especially active either in praising or condemning his teachings. Freud has thus been represented as a creator of morbid fancies, of unnatural or abnormal desires, a philosopher of fantasies, a fortune teller and an interpreter of dreams. The result of this undesirable publicity has been that the true students of Freud who knew him as a serious minded psychiatrist and neurologist, as a man shunning public attention and seeking only to blaze a trail in a new science, have unfortunately remained silent and permitted the quacks to revel in their spread of misinformation.

Somewhere in the period from 1904 to 1906 the "youth cult" seized this country. It had its origin perhaps in the famous misquoted half jesting remark of Dr. Osler. He denied that he had ever made the statement attributed to him; but that made no difference to the group of faddists who were intrigued by the idea. The youth cult caused an incalculable loss in money and brought about "scarcely less tragedy in waste of human values than even the world war." Fortunately the cult was comparatively short lived. Business executives began to realize the enormous cost of scrapping trained workers merely because of advancing years and sociologists much earlier realized the consequence to society of subordinates of forty-five or fifty being considered too old for efficient work.

From autosuggestion quacks reaped a rich harvest. Paid dispensers of sunshine and joy began their campaign about the time when the word first came into general use; they assured the world that all it needed to make everything right was to declare everything right, that to be rich it was only necessary to think money, to be famous only to think fame. "He can who thinks he can," "Right thinking makes right living," "A cheerful mind makes a sound body," were some of their catch phrases.

The suggestion quacks got many followers, because it is a natural human tendency to seek a short cut to success. Real accomplishments mean work and steadfastness of purpose; the acquisition of knowledge involves study, and thorough study requires patient, persistent application. Autosuggestion as successfully taught at Nancy and Geneva has proved helpful under some circumstances to those persons who have sincerely endeavored to understand and practice it. Despite the optimistic quacks, it has not made an international golf champion out of a duffer or a merchant prince from an incompetent, lazy clerk.

Putting aside the scientific aspect of the work, which the scientist and the psychologist must pass upon, it seems that Mr. Pierce has done a good job in writing "Our Unconscious Mind" if he has put people into the way of thinking clearly and correctly, of estimating at their real value the quack, false prophet and loose thinker and of assigning to buncombe, intentional misrepresentation and delusive theories their proper places.

LOUIS A. SPRINGER.

The Normal Dream World

ALL IS ONE. A Plea for the Higher Pantheism. By Edward Holmes E. P. Dutton & Co.

ANOTHER of Mr. Holmes's earnest tracts is stated, frankly, as "a plea for the higher Pantheism," and he writes with intense fervor of his own extraordinary experience—"a transcendental experience," he calls it—while convalescent after a severe surgical operation. After three weeks spent in the sunlit atmosphere of a "nursing home," where conditions were unusually grateful to a weakened physical state, he says: "I passed into a state called, for want of a better phrase, 'spiritual exaltation.' What was the cause or causes I cannot say, but as to the evidences and convincingness of the experiences there can be no doubt." In brief, his statement is this:

"I came nearer, then—such was and is my conviction—than I had ever done before to seeing things as they really are. My sense of proportion, a sense which I had somehow lost, or at least seriously impaired, seemed to have been completely restored. My standard of values, which had been perverted by various adverse influences, seemed to have been suddenly and authoritatively rectified. I knew what were the real things of life, the things that make life worth living, and my contempt for the things which men usually strive for—material possession, comfort, luxuries, success, advancement, distinction, position and the like—was unbounded. . . . It is my conviction that whatever may be the occasional cause or causes of a transcendental experience, the real cause is the passage through the soul of a man of pure and profound emotion which clarifies one's vision and exalts and quickens to an unwonted degree one's sensibility or power of reaching to the stimulus of environment."

Mr. Holmes declares his deep belief that "the world of my normal experience is the dream world; the world of which those fleeting experiences are real." And the whole conclusion of his thought and experience, "emerged as one triumphant conviction—far beyond the normal limits of a certitude—that the universe is an organic, a living whole, and that All is One."